

10-28-2003

Guest Artist Recital: Fritz Gearhart, violin

Fritz Gearhart

John Owings

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*"It is
my plan
to build
a school
of music
second
to none."*

—William
Grant Egbert
(1867–1928)
Founder,
Ithaca
Conservatory
of Music

SCHOOL OF MUSIC

ITHACA

VISITING ARTISTS SERIES 2003-4

Fritz Gearhart, violin
John Owings, piano

Sonata in A major, Op. 30, No. 1

Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770-1827)

Allegro
Adagio molto espressivo
Allegretto con Variazioni

Sonata No. 2 in D Major, Op. 94a (1944)

Sergey Prokofiev
(1891-1953)

Moderato
Scherzo: Presto
Andante
Allegro con brio

INTERMISSION

Variations in the Name of Peace (2003) (Premiere)

Robert Kyr
(b. 1952)

Suite for Violin and Piano

William Grant Still
(1895-1978)

Majestically; Vigorously
Slowly and expressive
Rhythmically and humorously

Hockett Family Recital Hall
Tuesday, October 28, 2003
8:15 p.m.

The Artists

Violinist **Fritz Gearhart** has performed for audiences from coast to coast. October 26, 2003 marks his sixth appearance in Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall since 1998. Several compact discs featuring Mr. Gearhart have been released in the last few years to rave reviews. A recent sampling from the press: "...a sizzling performance..."(*The Wall Street Journal*), "...supple and imaginative..."(*The New York Times*), "...a superlative evening of musicmaking..."(*New York Concert Review*), "Gearhart is a bold assertive player... a powerful exponent..." (Strad), and "...a magnificent young violinist..." (*American Record Guide*). Mr. Gearhart has been heard frequently on National Public Radio including several live broadcast performances, one of which was featured on the nationally syndicated program *Performance Today*.

Exploring unique and seldom-heard music, Mr. Gearhart has championed the music of American composer Quincy Porter with his 1998 release on Koch International and recently the 2001 release of *The Complete Works for Violin by Robert Casadesus* (also on Koch), features wonderful yet unknown works by this French pianist/composer. In January of 2002, Gearhart premiered a work written especially for him by award-winning American composer David Crumb.

In the early 90's, Gearhart was a member of the Chester String Quartet which performed extensively throughout the United States. He continues to be very active in chamber music and is now a member of the Oregon Quartet, which has performed for the nationally acclaimed Oregon Bach Festival and is featured in Gearhart's latest Koch CD, released in April 2002. In January 2001 Gearhart appeared as soloist with the Oregon Festival of American Music performing Bernstein's Serenade: "...[Gearhart] gave a stunning performance...he was in full command of Bernstein's elaborate solo parts..." (*Eugene Register-Guard*). Mr. Gearhart is currently on the faculty of the University of Oregon School of Music.

Pianist **John Owings** consistently wins enthusiastic praise from audiences and critics for his exciting pianism and sensitive artistry. "Real spiritual elation" was how the *London Daily Telegraph* described his playing of the Elliott Carter Piano Sonata. The Plain Dealer (Cleveland) called his playing a "fine blend of technical brilliance with expressivity," and the *Houston Post*, reviewing his performance of the Ravel g major concerto, said, "the audience was spellbound."

Since making his orchestral debut with the San Antonio Symphony at the age of 15, Mr. Owings has appeared as soloist with the symphony orchestras of Cleveland, Chicago, Dallas, Denver, Fort Worth, Houston, the Boston Pops, the English Chamber Orchestra, and the National Symphony Orchestras of Colombia and Peru. He has performed recitals in major cities in the United States, Latin America, Europe and the Far East and has been a guest artist at numerous music festivals. His compact disc recording on the Koch label - *The American Piano* - containing the piano sonatas of Barber, Copland and Carter, has received favorable critical acclaim. Also on Koch are his two CDs with violinist Fritz Gearhart: *The Unpublished Manuscripts of Quincy Porter*, and *The Complete Works for Violin by Robert Casadesus*. Writing in *New York Concert Review*, Harris Goldsmith called the Owings/Gearhart Duo's all-Grieg recital in Weill Hall at Carnegie Hall "a superlative evening of musicmaking - a real pleasure!"

The recipient of many prestigious awards and prizes, Mr. Owings won first prize in the 1975 Robert Casadesus International Piano Competition in Cleveland, the 1968 London Liszt Society Competition and the Musical Arts Competition in Chicago in 1980. He has served on the juries for major international competitions including the Casadesus, the Gina Bachauer, and the Beethoven in Vienna.

Following his early musical training in his native Texas, John Owings studied at the Royal College of Music in London as a Fulbright Scholar. Later, his studies took him to Switzerland, Italy and The Juilliard School, where he received his master's degree. His teachers have included Dalies Frantz, Rosina Lhevinne, Martin Canin, Karl Leifheit, Geza Anda and Wilhelm Kempff.

Since 1990 John Owings has been a member of the faculty of Texas Christian University where he holds the Herndon Professorship of Music. In 1993, the University conferred upon him its highest award, the Chancellor's Award for Distinguished Research and Creative Activity, for his performances of the 32 Beethoven Sonatas. A CD with six of the sonatas from these live performances is available.

Program Notes

Prokofiev wrote only three works for violin and piano. Each, however, stands out as an absolute gem in the literature. The *Five Melodies* were originally conceived as a vocal work in 1920, but Prokofiev reworked them for violin and piano in 1925. It is not surprising, therefore, that many of the themes have a song-like or narrative quality. Even the listener unfamiliar with this work will hear in these delightful

miniatures many of the composer's well-known trademarks – the unexpected twists and turns of the melodic phrase, the pungent and wry harmonies, and the totally unsentimental approach to rhythm. Each of the five pieces is dedicated to one of three prominent violinists – Paul Kochanski, Cecilia Hansen, and Joseph Szigeti.

Prokofiev began the *Sonata No.1 in F minor* in 1938, but did not complete it until eight years later in 1946. In contrast to the more light-hearted second sonata, the character of this work is extremely dark. The stark opening octaves in the piano's low register set a mysterious and foreboding mood. After a brief development of this material by both instruments, the violin plays rapid muted scales over a haunting, hushed chordal theme in the piano. Prokofiev's description of this section as "the wind through a graveyard" seems most appropriate. The violent and angry character of the second movement may partly account for the nickname "War Sonata" that is sometimes given to this work (as it is to the three piano sonatas composed during the same period). The conflict couldn't be more obvious than in this second movement's hammered three-note motive that is passed back and forth between violin and piano, intentionally never synchronized. A heroic second theme – with a rather satirical accompaniment in the piano – contrasts to this wild argument. The intense and frenzied activity of the second movement gives way to a dreamy and paralyzed third movement. Here it seems that the conflict is anesthetized but not resolved. The last movement – written in a complex rhythmic pattern – has the character of a boisterous romp, jubilant but restless. As the movement progresses, we hear several appearances of earlier material from the second and first movements until, at the close of the sonata, we find ourselves back at the graveyard.

The *Sonata No. 2 in D major* was originally composed for flute and piano and was premiered in that version on December 7, 1943, in Moscow. At the suggestion of Russian violinist David Oistrakh, Prokofiev adapted the flute part for violin, using many of Oistrakh's suggestions in the process. Six months later, in June of 1944, the work was heard again in Moscow in the new version, with Oistrakh as the violinist. The entire work is one of the most lyrical and optimistic that Prokofiev wrote – in spite of the fact that it was, like the first sonata, written during the Second World War. The Neo-Classicism that characterizes many of Prokofiev's works – the "Classical Symphony" being perhaps the most famous – is here in full bloom. With his wonderful gift for melody, clear sense of structure and sharp ear for detail, Prokofiev – with the help of David Oistrakh – has given us, in this work, a masterpiece of writing for violin and piano.

The theme of this set of thirteen variations (or, more aptly, transformations) is the hymn tune, "What Wond'rous Love is This," from the sacred harp tradition of the American South. In this vocal style, hymn tunes are harmonized with so-called "perfect" intervals -- fourths and fifths -- and the result is an austere, stark sound that contrasts with the European practice of harmonization using consonant thirds and sixths. The tune is stated by the violin at the outset and then immediately harmonized in the piano part, which includes many parallel fourths and fifths (forbidden in the European style). The set of thirteen variations on the tune explores a wide range of emotional expression from reflective lyricism to exuberant dance-like music, while modulating through all twelve key centers of the complete chromatic spectrum. The piece is a transformation of my first violin concerto (1996) which I created during the beginning days of the second Gulf War (March 2003); hence, the title of the work, which has a hidden double meaning. It refers to the A-minor tonality of the theme (E-A-C-E) as well as the cycle of thirds (A to C# to E and so forth) that is the basis for the modulatory scheme of the variation set. In this way, they were created "in the name of peace" in both spirit and musical practice. The work is dedicated to Fritz Gearhart and John Owings.

— Robert Kyr

Robert Kyr (b. 1952) is one of the most prolific composers of his generation; he has composed nine symphonies, three chamber symphonies, three violin concerti, and numerous works for vocal ensembles of all types. Several compact discs of Kyr's music are currently available including: *Unseen Rain* (New Albion NA 075); *The Passion according to Four Evangelists* (New Albion NA 098); *Celestial Light: Music by Hildegard von Bingen and Robert Kyr* (Telarc CD 80456), and *The Fourth River: The Millennium Revealed* (Telarc CD 80534). Kyr holds degrees from Yale (B.A., 1974), University of Pennsylvania (M.A., 1978), and Harvard University (Ph.D., 1989). At present, he is chair of the composition program at the University of Oregon, which is one of the largest in the United States—a thriving community of 50 composers. In addition, Kyr directs the Oregon Bach Festival Composers Symposium and Music Today Festival, and currently, he is the composer-in-residence for the Oregon Repertory Singers (2000-2004).

William Grant Still (1895-1978) has often been termed the patriarchal figure in Black music and was the first Afro-American composer to secure extensive publication and significant performances. His works

represent the culmination of musical aspirations of the Harlem Renaissance, in that they "elevated" folkloric materials. Such a concept, however, had been employed occasionally by earlier figures, including Harry T. Burleigh (1868-1949), Clarence Cameron White (1880-1960), R. Nathaniel Dett (1882-1943, New World NW 367), and Still's Afro-British model and cultural hero, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875-1912).

Still was born in Woodville, Mississippi, and his early days were spent in Little Rock, Arkansas, where his mother moved after his father's early death. His stepfather was a record collector, and those early opera discs and Still's violin studies stimulated the youth's interest in music. On graduation from high school, Still planned to study for a medical career, but his love of music was intensified at Wilberforce College, in Ohio, and especially at Oberlin, where he heard a full orchestra for the first time.

During this period, he worked in Memphis for W.C. Handy, subsequently joining him when Handy moved to New York City. In 1921 Hall Johnson recommended him as oboist for Eubie Blake's *Shuffle Along* (NW 260) and, while touring in Boston with the show, Still secured composition lessons from George Whitefield Chadwick. After his return to New York, he studied with Edgard Varese, although any avant-garde influence from this composer remains lost in Still's earlier, withdrawn works. He concentrated instead on the ethnic latitude more readily allowed by a neoromantic (and sometimes neoimpressionistic) approach.

Late in the 1920's, Still began to receive grants and awards, and these, combined with income from jazz arrangements written for Artie Shaw and others, enabled him to move to California. There, although only minimally active in writing for films (and later, television), he soon formulated an influential orchestral palette. The *Suite for Violin and Piano* (1943) demonstrates Still's attempts at approximating indigenous African music, as he had earlier with his choral ballet, *Sahdji* (1931). Musical materials were not available to him, as little scholarly attention had been given to that area of ethnomusicology during the 1930s. He had to settle on modal inventions, which, if not authentic, at least gave the flavor of the idiom he desired.

Still sought further inspiration for this work from visual artists. The first movement, drawing from Richmond Barthe's *African Dancer*, utilizes a three-measure phrase structure in the opening theme and a contrasting bluesy middle section. The second movement relates to Sargent Johnson's lithograph *Mother and Child*, and is an ardent and

lyric essay in ternary design. The finale portrays the impish and sometime sassy humor Still exhibited in "Li'l Scamp (in *From the Black Belt* 1925) and "Quit Dat Fool'nish" (1938). Its stimulus is *Gamin*, a bronze sculpture by Augusta Savage. The suite was dedicated to Louis and Annette Kaufman, who presented the premiere in Boston's Jordan Hall on March 12, 1944.

Dominique-Rene de Lerma
for New World Records 80399-2 *Works By William Grant Still*

SCHOOL OF MUSIC EVENTS CALENDAR

October

29	4:00	Guest Lecture/Recital; Tamara Raatz, clarinet
	5:00	Master Class; Fritz Gearhart, violin
	7:00	Master Class; John Owings, piano
31	9:00	Tuba Ensemble; David Unland, director

November

2	7:00	Faculty Recital; Kelly Samarzea, contralto and Diane Birr, piano
3	8:15	Faculty Chamber Music Recital; Ithaca Brass
4	8:15	Faculty Recital; Richard Faria, clarinet
6	7:00	Flute Ensemble; Heather Kriesel, graduate conductor
	8:15	Faculty Recital; Kunyoung Kim, piano
9	4:00	Faculty Recital; Angus Godwin, baritone
	7:00	Faculty Recital; Read Gainsford, piano
10	8:15	Faculty Recital; Rebecca Ansel, violin
11	8:15	Concert Band; Mark Fonder, conductor and Symphonic Band; Henry G. Neubert, conductor
13	8:15	Faculty Chamber Music Recital; Ithaca Wind Quintet
15	7:00	Choral Composition Competition Concert
17	8:15	Composition Premieres II
19	8:15	Brass Choir; Keith Kaiser, conductor

December

2	8:15	Opera Workshop; Patrick Hansen, music and stage director
4	8:15	Percussion Ensemble; Conrad Alexander, director
5	4:00	String Chamber Ensembles
	7:00	String Chamber Ensembles
	8:15	Jazz Workshop; Steve Brown, director Steve Wilson, soprano and alto saxophone
6	1:00	All-Campus Band, Beth Peterson, conductor
	8:15	Symphony Orchestra and Chamber Orchestra; Jeffrey D. Grogan, conductor

Ithaca College Concerts 2003-4

October 3	Czech Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra featuring Richard Ormrod, piano
January 29	Sharon Isbin, guitar and Gaudencio Thiago de Mello, percussion
March 25	Sylvia McNair, soprano & Ted Taylor, piano